
DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

***Public Roundtable on Proposed Resolution 18-0057 the "Director of
the Department of Employment Services Joseph P. Walsh Confirmation
Resolution of 2009"***



Testimony of Joseph P. Walsh
Acting Director
Department of Employment Services

Adrian M. Fenty
Mayor

COMMITTEE ON HOUSING & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Honorable Councilmember Marion Barry, Chairman

Wednesday, February 18, 2009

2:00 p.m.

**Room 123
Council Chamber
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004-3003**

***Director of the Department of Employment Services Joseph P. Walsh Confirmation
Resolution of 2009***

Public Roundtable
Committee on Housing & Workforce Development

Wednesday, February 18, 2009, 2:00 p.m., Room 123

Good afternoon Chairperson Barry and members of the Committee on Housing & Workforce Development. I am Joseph Walsh, and I am honored to be the Mayor's nominee for Director of the Department of Employment Services, and grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am also tremendously gratified by the testimony that was presented in support of my nomination today, and want to thank all those who took the time to be here or who presented letters of support to the Committee. I want to particularly acknowledge my former boss – and mentor – from Governor Deval Patrick's administration in Massachusetts, Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Suzanne Bump, for being here to personally offer her support for my nomination.

In the two months since I began as acting director, I have had the opportunity to meet with many of the staff at DOES, with Community Based Organizations, Business Leaders, Local and National Policy experts, Workforce advocates, and of course the members of the Committee. It has been a tremendous opportunity for me to share some of my ideas for how to improve our workforce system in Washington, DC and more importantly to listen and hear what needs exist – and what opportunities exist – among this tremendous network of groups and individuals who care deeply about employment and workforce development issues.

In the tough economic times that the nation is facing today, I believe employment services and workforce development play an incredibly important role.

- We need to be providing the basic services that the people in the District depend on - like unemployment assistance, workers compensation, and job referrals.

- We need to focus on our responsibility to our next generation – our youth – and ensure they are given the opportunities they need now to succeed as adults.
- And we need to focus on workforce development and adult job training and readiness. I believe preparing workers with the skills they need for the jobs of the future is essential for job creation and economic development in the District of Columbia. In fact I believe Workforce Development is economic development and that it needs to become the central focus of what we do at DOES.

All these challenges come at a time of unprecedented national economic difficulty. There are thousands of people in the District who are suffering and struggling to make ends meet after losing their jobs, and thousands more who are fearful that they could be next.

Before I talk more about the challenges we face and some of my plans for the agency, I'd like to take a moment to tell you a little bit about myself and my experience.

BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

As many of you know, this is a return to Washington, DC for me. I was born in Boston. My father was one of 11 children who went right from high school to the factory floor to help support his family, working for 42 years as a union machinist before retiring. My mother who grew up in one of Boston's housing projects went back to school nights after my sister and I were born to earn first her associates degree and eventually her Doctorate in education and now serves as a Superintendent of Schools in Massachusetts. Growing up I learned from them the lessons of the importance of hard work and the transformational power of education, lessons I carry with me every day to my work in workforce development.

Right after college I moved - like so many do – to the Nation's Capital with a desire to serve and be active in the civic life of the nation. I also fell in love with this City. I worked for several years with the civic education group the Close Up Foundation, and later served in President Clinton's Administration as the Education Director of the White House Fellows program. I returned to Boston in the late 90s to earn my Master's Degree in Public Administration at Harvard's

Kennedy School of Government and have worked for the last decade in community and economic development and workforce development, most recently in Gov. Patrick's Administration in Massachusetts, first as policy and operations advisor in the state's Division of Unemployment Assistance, and later as Director of Policy and Planning for the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.

CHALLENGES WE FACE

Those experiences have prepared me for the task ahead of improving the workforce development system in the District of Columbia and helping develop the programs and strategies that will create a pathway that will lead to job readiness and a new job or educational opportunity for our residents.

Many of the challenges we faced in my work in Massachusetts are the same as the challenges we face here. Some are unique to the District. But together there is hard work that needs to be done to improve the lives of working people and their families:

- We need to develop a Sector Based Strategy to guide our workforce development investments. That will mean using our labor market information data to identify those sectors that are still adding jobs, such as Health Care, or those, such as Green Jobs, that will be growing in the near future, and focusing our job training efforts in those growth areas – so we are sure training people for jobs of today and the future, not the jobs that have disappeared and may not be coming back.
- We need to close the “skills gap” – so that residents have all the training and education they need to be able to compete in the economy. This will require everything from enhanced Adult Basic Education and ESOL and improved job readiness training, as well as higher education opportunities.

In short, we need to make better connections with our partners in Education so that training and education opportunities exist throughout a person’s work life.

- We also have the challenge of connecting more youth to the world of work. The best predictor to having a job as an adult is having a work experience as a teen. But today we see the lowest teen participation rate in the labor market since World War II. In DC, teen unemployment was nearly 30% -- double the national average. This is our future, and we must move aggressively to connect young people to the job market.

This begins with the need to correct the mistakes from last year's Summer Youth Employment Program to ensure we deliver an experience that is well managed, well organized and provides a quality work experience for the youth of the District. But our youth focus must be broader than just the Summer Jobs program – we must develop quality year round programs for those in school and those who are “disconnected youth.”

- We must address the needs of the thousands of returning ex-offenders. The week before last Mayor Fenty opened the new Re-employment Center in the DC Jail, meeting with nearly 30 residents who are nearing their release date and are enrolled in

an intensive job skills and readiness program. We will enhance this by providing extended “wrap around” services coordinated through our One Stop Career Centers to provide not only job counseling services, but assistance with homelessness, substance abuse and other programs these returning residents have asked us for, and which are too often a barrier to their opportunities for a new job or educational opportunity.

- We have to address the concerns around First Source, working to make sure we are holding employers to their responsibilities under the law and meeting the programs goals of maximizing employment opportunities for DC residents.
- And finally I think we all agree that after 10 years of the One Stop Career Center model developed by the Federal government it is time for us in the District to completely re-examine the entire One Stop System. We need to rethink everything from how services are provided to where the facilities are located to who our partners are and finally and most importantly how to improve our customer service and our

client outcomes.

VISION FOR A NEW DOES

Since beginning my tenure as acting director of the Department of Employment Services I have told our staff that I truly believe that right now our agency has the single most important mission in District Government – at this moment, we need to be providing the basic services people depend on to live as well as developing the long-term programs and strategies that will create a pathway that will lead to job readiness and a new job or educational opportunity. And I've told our staff that we have to act with a greater sense of urgency than ever before because so many people are counting on us right now.

But this is also an agency in need of reform. It has to be a new day for DC's labor and workforce agency. I am committed to working to make DOES the highest performing agency in DC Government.

To do that, we need new thinking and new approaches and a commitment to excellence at every level of our operation.

I will work to see that the agency has professional management, high

expectations for accountability and customer service, and that we become a data-driven 21st century workforce agency, one focused on outcomes and results rather than enrollments and inputs. One in which every single member of the staff is committed to the mission of improving the lives of residents and increasing job opportunities in the District.

CONCLUSION

All these solutions will certainly help but we cannot address an economic problem of this magnitude by ourselves. I firmly believe in order to be successful – to create more job opportunities and a world-class, highly trained workforce to match them – we must do a better job of working together, with education, community based groups, local and national policy leaders here in Washington, the business community and the City Council, in order to achieve our goals.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I welcome any questions you may have at this time.